

Eötvös Loránd University

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Doctoral Dissertation Theses

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**Investigating Attitudes on Dialect and Language Use among Teachers
outside the Borders of Hungary**

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1. Introduction

The thesis focuses on the dialectal attitudes, linguistic awareness and the teaching of dialects, and educational problems of teachers outside the borders of Hungary – especially the south of Slovakia, which are connected with the linguistic/dialectic (identity) consciousness and awareness of teachers who daily meet students with partially dialectic primarily mother tongue variety, dialectic background and environment, respectively students using language dialect. The speech of minority speakers which is aimed to be common language is coloured by more dialectic elements than in Hungary, i.e. there is a greater extent of interlanguage of common language-based varieties than in the mother country (Lanstyák 2011: 58). The highly complex linguistic consciousness is studied on the basis of language use characteristics and the linguistic attitudes and value judgements of the respondents along sociolinguistic and sociological variables.

In the examined areas, a significant part of the population is not only the preserver but also the active user of some dialects or regional common language. State-language interference and dialectic elements can be observed both in their oral and written manifestations – though to varying degrees. The research pays special attention to how the respondents perceive the dialect they use together with their environment, the language use of their students, the need for linguistic correctness, and how they are influenced by the beliefs and prejudices about the varieties. It is also examined what their metalinguistic competence reveals about their linguistic/dialectic feeling of comfort as well as about their identity.

The importance of the topic is justified by the fact that the future of the native language in minority language communities may be dependent on the linguistic awareness, linguistic/dialectic attitudes of language users (Kiss 1996, 1999, Lanstyák 1998; Sándor 2000; Kontra 2003; Kožík 2004; Posgay 2007), since in many cases the language dialect is the only native language variety they have. In such circumstances, stigmatization of the dialect means stigmatization of the mother tongue, which will sooner or later have clearly negative consequences in terms of preserving the native language. This is especially true for the growing generation, young people looking for their identity, on which teachers and schools have a great impact. Because of their schooling circumstances, students may often be in a situation providing them with positive or negative experience due to their native language variety and this may have a major influence on their later language behaviour.

The diversity of Hungarian language is also reflected in dialects. The existential dimensions of language – space, time, and society – both influence language and language systems. Living languages exist in regional language varieties which are not separated from each other, but are closely connected. In many countries of Europe, however, a negative attitude to non-standard language use prevails, and it is believed that dialects mean lack of education (Trudgill 1996: 8). In Hungarian society, too, it is traditionally and quite generally accepted that dialectic varieties are less valuable and have a lower prestige than common language, but in spite of this, standard variety has retained its primary status in the public spaces of public communication (standard-centeredness is still quite strong), but in spoken

and electronic communication, dialectic varieties have become dominant also in formal situations (Tolcsvai Nagy 2017: 231). There are false beliefs about dialects and dialect use in society. According to widespread social judgment, one who speaks in dialect is uneducated. It is widespread that the use of dialect language is accused of spreading incorrect and wrong linguistic forms. It is also a general experience that speaking in a dialect is a linguistic disadvantage in Hungary (Lőrincze 1980: 215, Tolcsvai 2004: 101).

Applied dialectology also deals with the relationship between dialects and education. One of the goals of native language education is to acquire common language parallel with finding out about language varieties and code change education. However, based on my experiences, not all teachers are aware of the fact that in Hungary the primary native language variety of most children is a dialect. In the Hungarian-inhabited areas of the neighbouring countries, the vast majority of the population has used a dialect since their childhood. If this is not taken into account, the teacher can find it difficult to teach standard language to students. It is not disputed that the development of standard language competence is very important as “the knowledge and use of this language variety provides better social positions and mobility, but the lack of knowledge can adversely affect the individual’s social status” (Sándor 2007: 233).

The school and the teachers can help students develop a healthy, anti-prejudicial, positive approach to their own language use and the language use of minority and dialectic speakers. Tolerance and proper self-knowledge are inevitable for this (Antalné Szabó 2003: 294). But in many cases, teachers – mainly teachers of Hungarian – are not aware of the responsibility that comes with dialects at school. And if those who are supposed to present and convey human values and ideal behaviours are silent and are in the background or are even mocking students, who can the students expect to protect their human and linguistic rights (Szentgyörgyi 2013: 4)? It would be very important to have a large variety of changes in practice. The textbook analysis included in this thesis can contribute to these changes in several regions outside the borders of Hungary.

2. Research aims and hypotheses

Empirical research focuses on the native language awareness, native language and dialect use of teachers outside the borders of Hungary. I have examined the metalinguistic competence of teachers, including their attitudes on the (regional) common language and the dialect(s), because “the attitude, i.e. the subjective relation and linguistic view of the speaker has an important role in the choice of language, language varieties, linguistic phenomena and forms” (Kiss 1998: 315). The aim was also to find out how they relate to dialect and common language, how they judge their own language use and the language use of others, since they also influence the language use of their students. This is even more important on the stage of the language use of minorities since even the survival of the native language can be affected. Since the eighties and nineties, more people have dealt with the examination of the language use and attitudes of primary and secondary school students (l.

Guttmann 1982, 1984, 1986, 1989, 1998, Rajsli 1987, Fülöp 1990, Borbély 2002, Kožík 2004, Lakatos 2007, Lukács 2007, Boda 2011, Danczi 2011, Parapatics 2011, Beregszászi 2012). However, many of the findings and theoretical studies do not provide any methodological practical guidance on the teaching of dialects, though it would be very important to familiarize our students, the future adult society, with the linguistic diversity that surrounds them at the territorial level as well. Our investigation aims to complete this task, too.

In the various stages of public education, it is the task of the Hungarian teacher to assert dialectological and pedagogical aspects both in the process of native language education and during the lessons of the native language and literature, but the opinions and attitudes of other teachers are also very decisive for students. Students' language competence and language use also depends on the teachers.

Because of the identification with the above thoughts, as a teacher of Hungarian outside the borders of Hungary I have considered it important to focus on the attitudes of my colleagues, respectively on how to improve the judgement of dialects at schools, and to investigate the methods, techniques and strategies of science and education that could improve educators' and students' positive attitude towards dialects and towards the students and classmates who use these dialects. Research hypotheses are the following:

1. Respondents who speak in dialect are more emotionally related to their own dialect than those who claim that they do not use this language variety.
2. Most teachers are disturbed at some level when students speak in dialect at school during lessons.
3. Teachers believe that Hungarian is spoken in the nicest way in their own region.
4. Those who speak in dialect will also emphasize the role of dialects as a communicational tool rather than those who do not speak in dialect.

3. Material and method, research participants

In order to achieve the objectives of the research and to justify or reject the hypotheses a questionnaire study was conducted. The data collection took place between 2014 and 2017, involving 182 teachers from the Highlands (Felvidék) (92), Transcarpathia (Kárpátalja) (27) and Transylvania (Erdély) (63). The results were processed through computer, statistical calculations were done using Microsoft Office Excel 2007 and SPSS 20.

The mentioned questionnaire was based on the earlier questionnaire of Kožík Diána from 2004 (with the consent of the author). It was supplemented by additional questions, thus it is partly responsive to the results of the 2004 study. The questionnaire was sent online to different types of schools located in the areas inhabited by Hungarians of all three countries.

It was comprised of two parts. The first part dealt with the personal, family, language and work background data of the respondents (gender, age, place of residence, nationality, mother tongue,

parents' and spouse's qualifications, their mother tongue, school type, type of settlement, subjects taught, relations with Hungary etc.). The second part of the questionnaire examined the attitude towards the mother tongue and dialects. It contained multiple choice questions, response and scale-based questions as well.

4. Results

The answers most often correlated with the age of teachers, the type of their school, the school's geographical location, the type of settlement, the subject they teach, and the parents' education of respondents. In most cases there is a statistically significant difference between the responses of teachers working in rural and urban schools, as well as the answers of teachers teaching their mother tongue and teachers teaching other subjects (not mother tongue).

Although the teachers involved in the study did not completely condemn dialects, they did not show complete acceptance either. Based on their responses we can say that to a certain extent they all have an experience with dialects, even if not all of them speak in a dialect.

Even though the interviewed teachers acknowledge that dialects are used in their environment, they rather keep their distance from them. This is likely caused by the prejudices about dialects and dialect speakers. Despite the fact respondents keep aloof from negative stereotypes associated with dialectics, they can not completely ignore them. Teachers rather keep the distance from dialects and keep aloof from them (mainly in Transcarpathia): out of 182 people there are 83 non-dialect speakers. It refers to a hidden prestige that despite of keeping their distance from dialects, they do not have a negative opinion on them. They consider them to be interesting and beautiful, they perceive it as a value to preserve.

The type of schools also has an impact on the responses: out of 99 main dialect speakers 34 teach in rural schools and 65 in urban schools. Out of 83 non-main dialect speakers 34 works in a rural school, while 49 in schools in the capital. So half of those working in rural schools speak in a dialect, half of them do not, while the majority of urban school staff 57% use this language version, and 43% do not. (These data are based on the self-evaluation and self-assessment of teachers.)

All in all, we can conclude that the younger generation can remember more the advantages of dialects than its disadvantages. However, it does not mean they had more benefits or disadvantages because of this. A lot more people mentioned pros (39 people) than cons regarding dialects (16 people).

The regional language is the most popular language variant among respondents. Out of the examined cross-border areas the dialects are the most popular in Transylvania and the least popular in Transcarpathia. In Transylvania and the Highlands (Felvidék) the least popular language variant is the common Hungarian language. The perception of the Hungarian and regional languages is the best among the elder generation: on the five-grade Likert scale, the result was 3.69, among elderly 4.24, where grade 5 means the most popular value judgement.

22.2% of the 144 respondent teachers always correct dialect speech, 45.8% correct them only occasionally, and 32% say that they do not correct it.

5. Methodological Recommendations

The additive pedagogy of native language has a potential to help forming the sociolinguistical competencies in an efficient way, as it does not suppress the older, original dialect: it aims to teach the new version of speech in a way that preserves the dialect of the student and does not harm it. On the other hand the disruptive pedagogy strives the students' archaic, non-standard version of speech replace with the new one. The teacher has to endeavour to get the students to be acquainted with the role of the language and dialects in communication and with the application of the accessible linguistic tools in everyday speech (Menyhárt–Presinszky–Sándor 2009: 17).

Dialects can be taught in the same creative way as the other subjects within the other (not only native language) courses at school. We can deal with the dialects not only on Hungarian language classes and separately as dialects are connected to many other fields of education beyond the native language ranging from history, literature through geography to several artistic branches. Moreover, the teacher who talks with the students also in their dialect (or in local vernacular) makes them appreciate the dialect a lot more and enhances their sense of comfortability with the language (Mattheier 1980: 119).

Involving dialects in the teaching process in an adequate way and extent the speaking and writing competencies can be, and also, should be developed with tasks focusing on enhancing the vocabulary, reading with understanding, writing skills, linguistical design, forming the linguistic style and on the grammar.

In the process of teaching language skills connected to dialects and in forming a positive attitude to them working in pair or in teams is especially useful. The most effective of them in a sense of the children' social and linguistic sensibility, empathy are those which are built upon cooperation.

6. Conclusions

Can we have confidence that the examined / monitored Hungarian pedagogues form the attitudes of their students in a proper way as they struggle with innervations as a result of long-year process influenced with stereotypes? They can be influenced with the expectations from their environment suggesting that a teacher should speak “standard” Hungarian. This is supported with their answers in which they distance themselves from dialects in spite they declare to have positive or at least permissive attitudes to someone's dialect.

The survey that has been conveyed among pedagogues showed that the new viewpoints in the native language teaching, the scientific lectures held for pedagogues as a part of their further education has their results: the pedagogues keep themselves aloof from the widely expressed negative opinions

on different dialects and the persons who use them. However, the desired goal, building up the proper level of communication competencies, can be reached only when ceasing these inhibiting factors or at least reducing them. We can ascertain that the direction which has been set up is adequate and the pedagogues are trying to follow it.

As an active pedagogue I find that changing the approach aiming not only at the improvements in appraisal of the different variations of the Hungarian language and their usage, but also at the activities devoted to the language cultivation, the support of the consciousness in language, the language development, the unfolding of the reflective and self-reflective approach to language, is unavoidable and desirable. It would be welcomed if the teachers and the students could pay attention to these aspects (independently from the subject). The Hungarian language course should be a one, that builds knowledge applicable in practice, moreover it should form the students' attitudes through the relation between the (native) language and the active speakers and these goals should be achieved in a way that is interesting and motivating.

7. Theses

1st thesis: It is not characteristic for the speakers of a dialect that they would have emotional connection to their dialect: to a great extent (91,9 %) they reject the *I prefer the dialect to any other version of my native language* category of relation. Only 8 persons (8,1 %) prefer their dialect to any other version of their native language. 3 persons from the group of persons not speaking in dialect belong to this group, in spite they admit not using this version of language. Respondents speaking in dialect have to their dialect a stronger emotional relation than those who declare not using this version of language.

2nd thesis: Most pedagogues from Highlands and Transcarpathia do not regard their locally spoken language as the most beautiful version of the Hungarian language. The most critical to their own dialect were the respondents from Highlands, only 10 of them regarded their dialect as the most beautiful one, while 23 of them preferred more the dialect from Hungary and 21 of them the dialect from Transylvania to their own (respondents from Transcarpathia like more the dialect from Hungary as their own, but the respondents from Transylvania regard their own dialect as the most beautiful one from all). 59 persons from the three geographical areas, but only 26 respondents speaking in dialect (26,3 %) regard the version of language they speak as the most beautiful one, while in different place according to the answers of 43 pedagogues (43,4 %) people speak more beautifully, than they do it at "home".

3rd thesis: 71 % of all pedagogues teaching Hungarian language corrects with some frequency the use of language in case of students speaking in dialect, while 65,8 % of pedagogues teaching other courses than Hungarian does the same. Thus Hungarian language teachers admonish their students more

frequently in case they have said something in an other than the “proper” way, but there is no significant difference between the two results ($p \leq 0,05$).

4th thesis: There is no significant difference ($p \leq 0,05$) in the age of those who are uncomfortable with the dialects during the classes, but there is a difference regarding the geographical area the respondent comes from. The most uncomfortable with the dialect are the pedagogues coming from Transcarpathia. The reason of this can be, that in Transcarpathia there is a great stress in the Hungarian Teaching methods and in the language education on standard language usage (Beregszászi 2004: 93).

5th thesis: The respondents regard the dialects more as a tool for expressing identity than a tool for communication. According to 31,3 % of pedagogues dialect is also a simple tool for communication and the symbol of belonging to Hungarians, but the most of them (86,3 %) regard the dialect more as a tradition that should be preserved. Anyway, it is reassuring that in spite of keeping the distance from dialects they feel preserving them is important. According to the answers 99 respondents speak in dialect and 34 (34,3 %) pedagogues of them have marked the *simple language tool* possible answer, while from the 83 persons who do not speak in dialect 23 (27,7 %) of them have marked this answer(, too).

6th thesis: 48 pedagogues (26,4 %) do not feel uncomfortable with the dialects used during classes, while 134 teachers (73,6 %), the rest of them, feel uncomfortable to a certain degree. This way the 2nd hypothesis is fulfilled as the majority of pedagogues feel uncomfortable with dialects used during the classes. The pedagogues regards themselves more tolerant to the students speaking in dialect, than the student to their own classmates. They feel less uncomfortable with the dialect in the circle of the family and friends, than in more public places (especially in offices and during school classes).

7th thesis: The notes, textbooks, supporting materials that focus on modern and proper methods of teaching and education and on new achievements in research, have a significant role in the practise of teachers. The efficiency of language education can be risen by using modern textbooks focusing on practice, and although the expectations toward the effective and successful school education have been changed in the 21st century, unfortunately there are only few recently published pedagogical scientific works and textbooks originating beyond the borders, which could help the work of Hungarian language teachers in questions regarding the dialects by defining modern principles and new methods and special exercises in accordance with the recent demand from the side of children.

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